

Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

CHAPTER VI

Josiah Claiborne Traylor Calhoun-Jackson Counties

WHEN the Civil War ended and the slaves were freed and the "Old Plantation" days were forever ended for many of the big planters of the South, Josiah Claiborne Traylor, of Jasper, Texas, disposed of his other holdings in that section of the State as best he could, giving possession of his home on January 1, 1866. Then he loaded his household goods and family into covered wagons and started for Jackson county, Texas, with a somewhat diminished purse but with the indomitable courage of the early pioneers.

He was a well educated gentleman of English descent. He married Mary Keith (of the Beaumont Keiths of Georgia) about 1856. This was his second marriage. She was a cultured, gracious, charming Southern woman who directed her well appointed home as Southern women can do with a retinue of colored slaves. But when the slaves were freed, her courage equalled that of her husband in her determination to do her share in their new life.

They had traveled but a few days when it became necessary to camp for a while in order to receive a visit from the stork. So, Josephine, who later married Dr. J. T. Brooking, arrived in time to accompany the family to their new home at Texana, former county seat of Jackson county and near the present site of Edna.

Mr. Traylor established a small store. He bought cattle brands and started in the cattle business in a small way. It was here that his wife died.

In 1870 he married Charlotte Sheppard. From 1866-1876 his cattle were on the open range but in 1875 he bought the Swan Lake pasture located in Calhoun and Jackson counties and containing between 25,000 and 30,000 acres of land. It received its name because it contained a lake on which 14 swans usually spent the winter. Mr. Traylor built one of the first board fences in that section.

He built a big beautiful two-story ranch home on a high bluff that overlooked three bodies of water—the Lavaca River, Lavaca Bay and Swan Lake. It was cool and there was a good view from every window.

Big freight boats went up the river to Texana and returned to Indianola once each week until Indianola was destroyed during the storm of 1886. These boats brought mail and also picked up outgoing mail at the landing each trip. A white flag was the signal to stop for mail.

"The mother is the one who holds the children together and makes the home" is a traditional remark. But Mr. Traylor evidently was also a home-maker. There was never any quarreling among the three sets of children and they all loved their step-mothers, especially the last one who lived several years after Mr. Traylor's death.

"My only unpleasant recollection was that I had to wear the hand-me-down clothes, because I was one of the young-



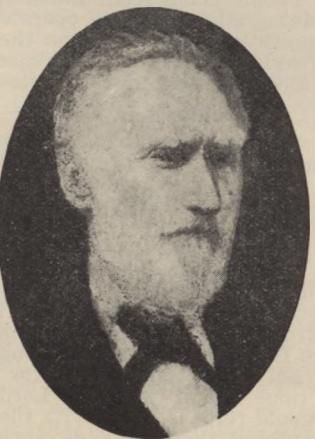
MRS. CHARLOTTE SHEPPARD TRAYLOR

est," recalled Josephine. "And we had such good times at home."

"One would have never realized there had been a step-mother in the family," stated Mrs. W. L. Traylor, wife of W. L. Traylor, a son who still lives on the ranch.

While the children were at home under the care of "Ma" as they affectionately called her, Mr. Traylor was busy looking after his store and his rapidly increasing cattle holdings. He would frequently leave before daylight and not return until after dark. While he was not a physician he had studied medicine and he always found time to nurse the sick in the community.

The Traylor's were never lonely. They played croquet, checkers, authors, rowed boats, rode horseback, hunted and fished. Each had special home duties for which he was responsible. There were nearly always four of the girls at home. Two of them looked after the work in the kitchen and two after the house. They had a cook most of the time and nearly always had the washing and ironing done by a negro woman. Occasionally, however, they were without help but these were the gayest days in the week. The boys helped and they made a lark of it, though it was a big job. White ruffled shirts worn by the boys and the numerous ruffled skirts worn by the women of the family made



JOSIAH CLAIBORNE TRAYLOR

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ironing a big job even though they had fun doing it.

Josephine Traylor—Mrs. J. T. Brooking—did not learn to cook as early as some of the girls because she was younger. But it was "Jody, will you please bring a bucket of water?" So she was kept busy and enjoyed the fun with the older children while they worked.

Mrs. Traylor managed everything smoothly. She always carried the keys to the large pantry and dealt out to the negroes the food she wanted them to have each day. Mr. Traylor was kind but very firm with the children. He always wore a coat at the table and would not wear darned socks. He was proud, well educated, and was careful about the language they used. It was his determination that the children should have the best advantages of that time. Although they lived rather an isolated life for several years the children were taught to observe certain formalities that some people left off during the hardships of the early pioneer days. Each child was dressed and properly groomed for the day before he appeared at the breakfast table. Both parents instilled into the children an appreciation of the refinements and courtesies that are essential evidences of a cultured and educated individual. He always impressed upon the girls that they were ladies and insisted that they keep their hands nicely.

Another indication of Mr. Traylor's interest in the development of the community and welfare of the other children was in providing the same educational opportunities for them that he provided for his own. He employed a governess to stay in the home and teach them. During the school term 20 people usually ate there, for the neighbor children boarded with him and attended school. A big room was set aside as a class room where each day from 8 o'clock until 4:30 they followed a regular schedule. The teachers were very thorough. One of the Traylor children declares she "went through fractions 13 times." They also received instructions in piano and voice. Plays and programs were frequently put on, to which the parents were invited. When the children were ready for higher education some of them attended school in Virginia, some at a Methodist College in Waco, and in Victoria. "School away" was considered a finishing school. All of the children received some musical training. And Miss Josephine taught music at Coronal Institute at San Marcos and also studied art there.

The family probably had much the same troubles that other pioneer families had to combat, especially after the storm of 1886 during which Indianola was destroyed. Mr. Traylor was at home at the time. The hardest part of it occurred during the day, though every member of the family had gotten up during the night and dressed. They could watch the waves from their high viewpoint on the bluff that overlooked



The Old Traylor Home on Swan Lake Ranch

Left to right on the porch are Adeline, now Mrs. H. C. Coates, Edna, Texas; Miss Lida Hewitt, a teacher on the home. Downstairs are Olive, later Mrs. W. R. Sells; Laura May, later Mrs. LaBauve, both of whom are dead, and Josephine, who married Dr. J. T. Brooking, and who still lives with her son on part of the old Traylor Ranch. J. C. Traylor, with the baby, Charlotte Lillian, in his arms, and his last wife, Mrs. Charlotte Sheppard Traylor.

the three bodies of water. The waves were beautiful, even when the family could almost feel the walls of the house move.

After this storm the great steamships quit coming into Indianola and the boats quit going up and down the river. It was harder to get mail and to get groceries. Much of the shopping had to be done in Victoria which at that time was a long hard trip.

Mr. Traylor was resourceful and a good manager. He raised vegetables—

okra, beans, cabbage, turnips and greens; also watermelons, peaches and plums. There were nearly always an abundance of wild grapes and dewberries in season. Mrs. Traylor made preserves and kept it in stone jars with a cloth tied tightly around each jar.

The Traylor were noted for their hospitality. They would frequently entertain ten to fifteen guests for two weeks at a time, even without a cook. Ham or steak, eggs, potatoes, biscuit and always syrup, jelly or preserves were always included in the breakfast menu. Three kinds of meat, and two kinds of bread in addition to all sorts of other good dishes were served for dinner. There was usually an abundance of wild turkey, deer and plenty of fish. When the children and guests heard the grinding of the coffee in the morning they knew that was the signal to get up.

The house did not have screens. One of the smaller children usually had to "shew" the flies off the table, probably with a Chinaberry limb. Dishwashing was the biggest job when they had lots of company and did not have help. However, they all helped and made a lark of it.

Mr. Traylor was a very progressive man of his time. He never liked to be in debt. He tried to provide all the conveniences that would make the work easier. He rigged up a Dutch windmill to grind corn meal, grits and chicken feed. It had wind sails that turned the mill. People came from Edna, Ganado, and Matagorda to see it operate. The blacksmith work was done on the place. Mr. Traylor usually did it himself and wore a white shirt at the time.

Specialized in Cattle

He planted corn to feed stock and to make a crop "next year." But his main business was cattle. His son, W. L., and grandson still live on part of the ranch on which large herds of whiteface cattle graze. The old Traylor brand, which is one of the oldest in the country, is still used by them. His older boys "went up the trail" while Mr. Traylor looked after his interests at home. The women folks did not worry, though they could not hear from them for weeks at a time. If it was the Lord's will they would return. Otherwise there was not anything they could do about it.

And trusting in the Lord was not a

thing in the Traylor home to lean upon in times of trouble only. Each Sunday morning services were held in the parlor. Not a child was excused from attending these services. Mr. Traylor and his son, Robert Keith, conducted the Sabbath devotions, or taught the lessons. Each read a verse of the Scripture lesson, both the parents taking part. The children staying in the home for school, all attended. They enjoyed the music. The girls were all good musicians. The boys played the violin, accordion and harmonica.

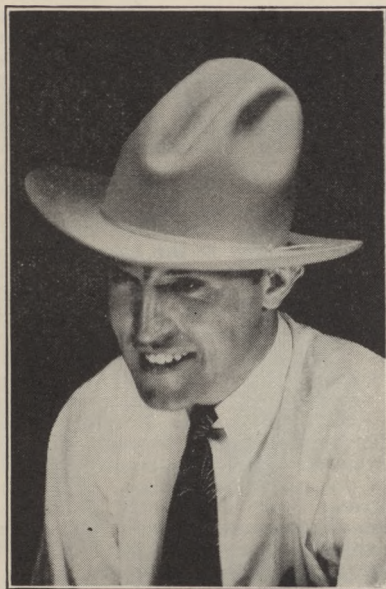
The children all loved their home. While the boys helped their father with the 10,000 head of cattle that usually were on the ranch, the girls were busy with household duties, or doing fine embroidery or other fancy work and sewing for the family. They were great readers, and entertained lavishly for that day. They gave dances, and they visited quite a bit. One of the boys especially was always ready to take his fiddle on one side of the saddle and croquet set on the other to any place the young people wished to get together.

In answer to my question as to why she thought the children got along so well with each other, Mrs. Brooking replied, "When a woman married in those days her object was to make a home—a pleasant home. She thought it all out before she married in order that she could more nearly create a picture of harmony. Naturally she tried to keep her home neat and orderly. Her children were neat. She taught them to love and respect their father. He was the head of the house. She and the children did everything to make him comfortable and happy. So he, too, loved his home."

But the last Mrs. Traylor probably summed it all up when some one asked her how she ever made up her mind to marry a man with two sets of children and who was several years her senior, when she replied, "I loved Mr. Traylor well enough to share his responsibilities."

The children by Mr. Traylor's first wife, Mrs. Jimima Harrison Traylor, are all dead. They were Chas. Wesley, Richard Benjamin, Josiah Claiborne, Champion Travis, and Sarah Ann. The children by his second wife, Mrs. Mary Keith Traylor, were: Robert Keith Traylor, San Antonio; Adeline Alabama, married H. C. Coates and lives in Edna; Mary Emily, dead; Regina married Dr. Beauregard, Edna, is dead; Olive Azeik, married W. R. Sells, Orange, is dead; Josephine, married Dr. J. T. Brooking, near Olivia and still lives with her son on part of the old Traylor ranch; John Traylor, dead.

The children by the third wife, Mrs. Charlotte Sheppard Traylor, are: William Lee Traylor, who still lives on the old Traylor ranch near Port Lavaca; Laura May, married Dr. LaBauve, dead; Charlotte Lillian married L. D. Hensley and still lives near Carancahua Bay.



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